

More than half of Americans still “less likely” to support a non-religious presidential candidate

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A Pew survey conducted in January 2016 has found that Americans are still put-off by an atheist presidential candidate, with 51% saying they would be less likely to support a non-religious aspirant.

While just 6% would be more likely to support an atheist and 41% say a hypothetical candidate's atheist "wouldn't matter", religious minorities fared much better than a candidate with no religion.

As in previous polls, a potential Muslim candidate would have much less of a disadvantage than a non-religious presidential hopeful. Over half of Americans, 53%, say they wouldn't be put-off by a Muslim candidate, and only 42% - almost ten points lower than for a non-religious candidate – would be less likely to vote for a Muslim.

American voters are more likely to vote for somebody who has had an extramarital affair or past financial troubles than a candidate who "does not believe in God."

The Pew Research Centre said that "being an atheist remains one of the biggest liabilities that a presidential candidate can have."

However they noted that "the share of American adults who say they would be less likely to vote for an atheist candidate has been declining over time" – pointing to a growing acceptance among Americans of non-religious candidates, despite the poll.

A secularist campaigner has gained headlines during the 2016 primaries for challenging candidates to defend the separation of church and state in America. The [Washington Post](#) reported that Justin Scott, from Iowa, "spoke to every major presidential contender and more than a few of the minor ones" about secularism – challenging them among other things over why an atheist should consider voting for them.

He told the *Washington Post*, "I'm all for you having your beliefs. Go to church. Wear your cross necklace. Bring your Bible to school. I don't care. But when I have elected officials trying to influence my life and my family's life based on their religious beliefs and traditions and preferences, I have a huge problem with that."

Scott remains optimistic about an openly non-religious candidate being elected in the future. "For a while, we didn't think we could have an African American president. And look what happened."

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